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ABSTRACT

This Spring 2003 issue of the "Learning Point," the North Central Regional Educational Lab's (NCREL) magazine, focuses on the theme "A Call for Evidence Responding to the New Emphasis on Scientifically Based Research." Articles and materials in the issue are: "Wake-Up Call: Facing the Challenge to Use Scientifically Based Research in Schools" (Sheryl Poggi), which notes that the No Child Left Behind Act references the use of scientifically based research over 100 times within the pages of the legislation; "Digging Out: How to Avoid Getting Buried under a Mountain of Research" (Danielle Carnahan and Michele Fitzpatrick); "The Communication Gap: Building Effective Parent-Teacher Partnerships" (Ann Kinder); NCREL News and Notes; "Faces of NCREL: Laine Strives for High Quality in Education" (Rebecca Phillips); "Schools on the Rise--Get REAL: Evidence-Based Change Yields Success in Ohio" (Mary Kathleen O'Kelly); "Partners for Success--Walking the Walk--The What Works Clearinghouse" (Chris Otto); and "Point of Reference--Perspectives from the NCREL Resource Center: Need Research? Ask Us" (Arlene Hough). (NKA)

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A Call for Evidence Responding to the New Emphasis on Scientifically Based Research

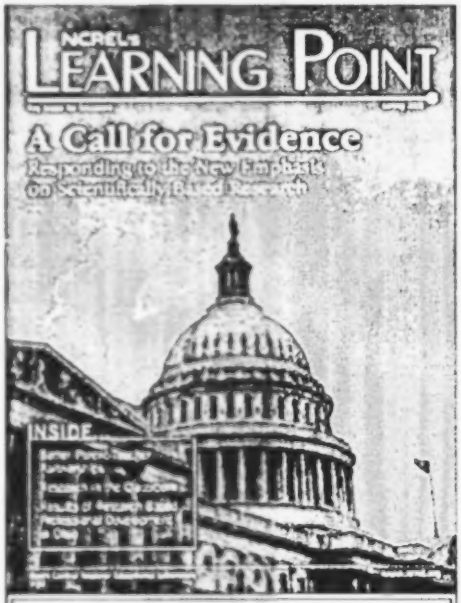

Table of Contents

Cover Story
Wake-Up Call
By Sheryl Poggi
Facing the Challenge to Use Scientifically Based Research in Schools

Features
Digging Out
By Danielle Carnahan and Michele Fitzpatrick
How to Avoid Getting Buried Under a Mountain of Research

The Communication Gap
By Ann Kinder
Building Effective Parent-Teacher Partnerships

Departments
News and Notes

Faces of NCREL
Laine Strives for High Quality in Education
By Rebecca Phillips

Schools on the Rise
Get REAL

Current Issue

Spring 2003: A Call for Evidence, Responding to the New Emphasis on Scientifically Based Research

Back Issues

Fall 2002: All Wired Up ...Now What?

Spring 2002: From Congress to the Classroom

Fall 2001: Bridging the Great Divide, Perspectives on Closing the Achievement Gaps

Fall 2000: Teaching Math and Science in the Real World

Summer 2000: How Schools

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CS 512 381

By Mary Kathleen O'Kelly
Evidence-Based Change Yields Success in Ohio

Partners for Success
Walking the Walk
By Chris Otto
The What Works Clearinghouse

Point of Reference
Need Research? Ask Us
By Arlene Hough

Use Data to Help Students Learn

Spring 2000: Professional Development and Student Achievement

Fall/Winter 1999: How Parent Involvement Makes a Difference

Spring/Summer 1999: How Reading Engages Children

Winter 1999: Taking an Electronic Field Trip to Africa (Educational Technology)

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NCREL North Central Regional Educational Laboratory

LEARNING POINT

NCREL's Learning Point (Spring 2003)

Contents | Next

Wake-Up Call

Facing the Challenge to Use Scientifically Based Research in Schools

By Sheryl Poggi
Educational Consultant

Every day we expect people to base their practices on evidence that demonstrates proven results—doctors diagnosing patients, lawyers advising clients, and educators teaching our children. In fact, the U.S. Congress that passed the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 believes so strongly in the use of scientifically based research that it is referenced over 100 times within the pages of the legislation—in every section and on every topic.

The focus on improving teacher effectiveness and raising student achievement through the use of scientifically based research (SBR) is fundamental to the successful implementation of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act. The law requires knowledge and application of scientifically based research in the curricular areas of reading, mathematics and science, instructional methods and strategies, parent involvement, professional development, extended learning, language instruction, reduction of violence and illegal drug use, and gifted education.

This requirement places quality research in high demand and presents challenging opportunities for educators. How will educators know what programs and practices are based on scientific research? How will they integrate SBR into daily practice? How will SBR change teaching and learning? How will educators make decisions about SBR as it relates to their specific data-based needs?

The American Institutes for Research (2002) developed a useful framework to help teachers determine if a program or practice is based on scientific research. The authors suggest that teachers look at the evidence against two standards—a "gold standard"of SBR and, in the case of limited research, a "silver standard" of working toward SBR. The following three areas form the criteria of the

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framework:

- ***Theoretical base of the program or practice.*** Does the program or practice have specific goals, a clear explanation of how it works in practice, and a description of implementation activities?
- ***Evidence of effects.*** Does each teaching and school instructional practice provide multiple, high-quality studies that look at the impact on students and demonstrate that the practice improves student achievement?
- ***Implementation and replicability.*** Does the practice or program identify a number of schools that have successfully used and fully implemented the practice or program with the type of students your school serves? (American Institutes for Research, 2002)

The Institutes' work (U.S. Department of Education, 2002) also provides guidelines for judging the quality of a study, guidelines for interpreting findings and judging the strength of evidence, and a decision-making tree that helps to judge the evidence of effects. These tools can be found in Comprehensive School Reform Program Guidance—submitted to the U.S. Department of Education in April 2002 (www.ed.gov/offices/OESE/compreform/guidance2002.pdf).

Basis for SBR Practices and Programs

Before school staff members can determine which SBR practices or programs should be implemented, they must first collect and analyze data. Collecting and analyzing data is part of most school improvement planning efforts, and it generally uses observations, surveys, interviews, and archival records to obtain information in the following areas:

- Standards and curriculum, particularly in reading, mathematics, and science.
- Achievement (i.e., state, district, school and classroom, data to determine and monitor student achievement).
- Teacher quality (i.e., content expertise in and application of SBR reading, mathematics, and instructional strategies).
- Professional development (e.g., mentoring, induction, and continuing professional development).
- Learning environment (e.g., climate, school safety, classroom management, health, and nutrition).

Once data has been collected, it must be analyzed to look for trends, plausible explanations, clusters of information that fit together, meanings, and implications for action. The goals and activities in the school improvement plan should be developed from the data analysis and based on scientifically based practices and programs.

Being a Good Consumer of SBR

Using a thorough data-collection and analysis strategy can ensure that educators are good consumers of SBR programs and practices. Often educators make decisions about a program or practice based on external pressures, perceptions or biases of individuals, or the need to find a quick remedy without basing it on their school data and information. Being a good consumer of SBR practices and programs requires the school staff to do the following:

- ***Determine the relationship to the data.*** Does the program or practice identified match the identified need? Will the desired result be achieved? For example, if the data reveals that fluency is an area for reading improvement, yet sustained silent reading is the practice adopted by the school, will reading fluency improve?
- ***Assess the return on investment.*** Does the cost of the program or practice yield improvement in the area(s) identified by the data? For example, if a program is purchased to improve reading, it costs $150,000 and serves 10 students each semester ($15,000 per student), yet the data identifies 50 students who could benefit from the program, is that a good return on investment, or is there another SBR program that would serve more students at less cost?
- ***Determine the breadth of impact.*** Does the program or practice serve a sufficient number of the targeted students? For example, if a reading program is adopted that serves small numbers of first graders, yet the data reveals that 75 percent of first-grade students are low in reading, will the number of students served be sufficient?
- ***Assess immediate impact versus long-term results.*** How long will it take to see results from the program or practice? Is the anticipated time for improvement sufficient to make adequate yearly progress? For example, if a three-year program is adopted by a school that is in corrective action and begins with the first year of training for three teachers, expands to fifteen teachers the second year, and engages the entire staff the third year, is it likely that sufficient progress will be made in the first year to prevent the school from being restructured?
- ***Judge sustainability.*** What are the short- and long-term costs of the program or practice? Does the district or school have the current and projected revenue and staff resources to sustain the program or practice? For example, if a program or practice is adopted that requires employment of additional staff (versus reassigning existing staff) subsidized by a grant, and the district or school projected financial status is poor, will the program be able to be sustained over time once the grant is over?

NCLB Focus on SBR

NCLB requires educators to be good consumers of SBR in specific areas—areas that Congress believes would lead to improved student achievement if they were fully and accurately implemented. While much has been written on the content areas, less has been said about curriculum and instructional methods.

NCLB dictates that schools institute and fully implement curriculum that not only is based on state and local academic content and achievement standards to attain proficiency in meeting state academic achievement standards, but also incorporates SBR strategies that strengthen the core academic program (specifically referencing reading, mathematics, and science). Further, it is required that programs employ research-based cognitive and perceptual development approaches and rely on a diagnostic-prescriptive model to improve students' learning of academic content at the preschool, elementary, and secondary levels.

It is assumed that implementation of standards results in improved student achievement. One of the few studies on this topic reveals a positive correlation. An evaluation of the implementation of the Illinois Learning Standards project, a four-year study ending in 2002, assessed the extent to which districts were implementing learning standards, identified factors that enhanced or inhibited implementation, and investigated the relationship between standards and student achievement (DeStefano & Prestine, 2002). Not until the fourth year of the study did significant correlations between learning-standards implementation and specific content areas emerge.

Students attending schools with higher overall learning-standards implementation levels scored higher in Grade 3 reading, Grade 5 mathematics, and Grade 8 mathematics. Standards have brought clarity and focus to school improvement efforts, and research is emerging that standards have a positive effect on learning (DeStefano & Prestine, 2002).

The use of effective methods and instructional strategies that are based on SBR that strengthens the core academic program of the school are yet another of the areas identified in NCLB. Researchers at the Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning have identified nine instructional strategies that are most likely to improve student achievement across all content areas and across all grade levels, including: identifying similarities and differences, summarizing and note taking, and representing knowledge. These strategies are explained in *A Handbook for Classroom Instruction That Works* (Marzano, Norford, Paynter, Pickering, & Gaddy, 2001).

Ten years ago, there was little evidence that SBR existed in education. However, more recent research about what works has emerged to provide direction and guidance for educators. In fact, the U.S. Department of Education's Institute of Education Sciences has established the What Works Clearinghouse to provide

educators with a central source of evidence about what actually works in education. (For more information on the What Works Clearinghouse, see "Partners for Success"

Through implementation of SBR practices and programs, educators will have greater confidence that what they are doing in the classroom will have the greatest likelihood of improving student performance. Part of the challenge will be to accept this emerging research and be prepared to change policies and practices to reflect it. Educators must examine what is taught, when it is taught, and how it is taught. Changing individual educator practices may present an even greater challenge than identifying scientifically based research.

10 Ways Educators Can Integrate SBR Into Practice

1. **Learn the definition of SBR. (For the complete definition of scientifically based research as it appears in NCLB, see Digging Out.)**
2. **Compare the definition of SBR to current programs and practices.**
3. **Consider abandoning any program or practice that doesn't meet SBR standards.**
4. **Collect and analyze data to identify specific needs of the students in the school.**
5. **Target efforts to find SBR that matches those needs.**
6. **Be a good consumer of SBR.**
7. **Know what the research says. Don't be swayed by glitzy packages and presentations.**
8. **Examine resources that can support SBR (e.g., reassignment of staff, reallocation of funds).**
9. **Follow a plan; be sure the SBR practice selected is getting the desired result.**
10. **Collect formative and summative data on the practice.**

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Contents | Next

Back to Top

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NCREL North Central Regional Educational Laboratory

LEARNING POINT

NCREL's Learning Point (Spring 2003)

Contents | Previous | Next

Digging Out

How to Avoid Getting Buried Under a Mountain of Research

By Danielle Carnahan and Michele Fitzpatrick
Reprinted with permission of the National Staff Development Council. Originally appeared in **JSD, Spring 2003 (Vol. 24, No. 2)** *as "Don't Get Buried Under a Mountain of Research."*

Consider this scenario: It is school improvement planning time—again. While preparing a professional development plan based on literacy, you begin an intense search for articles and information that you can use to align this plan with both your state and national goals. A priority in this search is material that will meet the Reading First stipulations of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, the $900 million program aimed at ensuring that the nation's children are proficient readers by the end of third grade. As you begin digging into the pile of articles you have accumulated, the sheer volume of information seems overwhelming. Where do you start?

Strategies to find the information you need

Becoming a sophisticated consumer of research on literacy is a continuing process, not a one-time accomplishment. It begins—as does any journey into new territory—with adjustments and attempts to comprehend new information that may seem a foreign language. Then it requires verbalizing what you don't know, asking questions. Finally, it requires a keen sense of inquiry, sniffing out the best sources of information to address those questions.

Here are some practical tips for your journey of applying the right type of research to translating research into classroom practice:

1. **Savvy readers comprehend research language.**
   First, learn the core definition of scientifically based research, which appears in the No Child Left Behind (2002) legislation, under Reading First (Title I, Part B, Subpart 1, Section 1208):

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The term "scientifically based reading research" means research that:

A. Applies vigorous, systematic, and objective procedures to obtain valid knowledge relevant to reading development, reading instruction, and reading difficulties; and
B. Includes research that:
    i. Employs systematic, empirical methods that draw on observation or experiment;
    ii. Involves rigorous data analyses that are adequate to test the stated hypotheses and justify the general conditions drawn;
    iii. Relies on measurements or observational methods that provide reliable and valid data across evaluators and observers and across multiple measurements and observations; and
    iv. Has been accepted by a peer-reviewed journal or approved by a panel of independent experts through a comparably rigorous, objective, and scientific review.

Within and related to this definition are a number of terms that warrant further translation:

Observational methods: Methods researchers use to document events, behaviors, and surroundings.

Data analyses: Using the artifacts of instruction to help see more clearly where students are, where they are going, and what patterns are emerging.

Hypothesis: A statement of prediction of the results of a research project.

Professional wisdom: "The judgment that individuals acquire through experience...Increased professional wisdom is reflected in numerous ways, including the effective identification and incorporation of local circumstances into instruction" (Whitehurst, 2002).

Empirical evidence: "Scientifically based research from fields such as psychology, sociology, economics, and neuroscience, and especially from research in educational settings...Objective measure of performance used to compare, evaluate, and monitor progress" (Whitehurst, 2002).

Evidence-based education: "The integration of professional wisdom with the best available empirical evidence in making decisions about how to deliver instruction" (Whitehurst, 2002).

2. **Sophisticated readers of research ask the right questions.** A dozen years ago, S. Jay Samuels and Alan E. Farstrup

offered an insight about research that remains valid today. They wrote, "Research is not a collection of ready-made answers to instruction-related questions, waiting to be claimed by eager and trusting teachers. It is a resource that can provide direction and substance for making instructional decisions when it is approached with purpose and caution" (Farstrup & Samuels, 1992, p. 1).

As consumers of research, educators must critically inspect materials that claim to be research based. Educators must bring to the table qualities that enhance this process—qualities such as a well-developed sense of inquiry, experience in the field, and commitment to authentic learning. Evaluating research as a smart consumer means knowing how to interpret the claims made related to being "scientifically based." When reviewing materials that purport to provide research-based evidence, take the following steps:

- First, determine what kind of document it is. Generally, there are three categories of documents:
  - How-to documents, which describe, step-by-step, the process of implementing a strategy or program.
  - Descriptive documents, which generally describe the unqualified success of one program or another. Such documents may include a scenario, individual program, initiative, curriculum, strategy, plan, or method.
  - Research documents, which generally include some or all of the following: literature review, results of a study or survey, thesis supported by evidence. Such documents likely will include graphs, tables, charts, statistics, or other data to support the thesis.

  As informative as how-to, descriptive, and some research documents are, a closer look is needed to interpret whether the evidence provided is sufficient and valid, and whether the evidence is transferable to your classroom or school. Sound research should be able to be used in the classroom to assist with curriculum, instruction, and assessment.

  Feuer, Towne, and Shavelson (2002) state,"No method is good, bad, scientific, or unscientific in itself: Rather, it is the appropriate application of method to a particular problem that enables judgments about scientific quality" (p. 8).

- Second, ask these questions:
  - **Who** conducted this research? Does the organization or individual possess credible background to address the research topic with an

authoritative voice? Is there reason to believe that the organization would have any bias regarding the topic that might make the research results questionable?

- **What** is being researched? Is the research topic focused sufficiently so that the data gathered can support feasible results? Is the information interpreted without bias?
- **When** was the research conducted? Classic research studies can have as much validity as recent research studies. However, the timeliness of the results is important, and it should influence how the reader applies the results of the research. If the research is brand new, does it pay attention to the studies and findings that came before?
- **Where** was the research done? Is the number of individuals involved in the study enough for a credible measure, given the topic studied? Does the research cover people and places like your classroom or school?
- **Why** was the research conducted? Remember: context, context, context. If the research was conducted to prove the effectiveness of a program, or sponsored by persons who could benefit from positive results, this reason needs to be taken into consideration. Is there any other research that is relevant to this piece? If so, are the researchers speaking with the same voice? If not, why do the pieces disagree? Research is a community enterprise. Communal work and expertise is needed to validate findings. Research that provides answers to questions should not be carried out in isolation, but in a community of inquiry.
- **How** was the data gathered and analyzed? Is the methodology sound? What process was used to develop appropriate questions and to determine how to organize the data and how to analyze the data? Is the solution connected to the research? Is it clear that the instrument or intervention made the changes? Again, there are resources that can help you with this.
- **Hmmm?** Trust your own instincts. Remember, you bring useful perspective and knowledge to the table. If the research seems tainted or suspect, that is reason to pause and ask, "Why?"

3. **Inquisitive readers find reliable information.**
   The search for reliable sources begins with taking a close look at the existing research base. Credible sources are very important. Many of the same questions suggested to examine research also can be asked of information sources.

If you are beginning to investigate a specific content area, such as reading, here are some supplemental questions: What information can be found? What information is missing? What information is debated within the community? If you ask yourself these questions, you will begin to feel comfortable that you have identified the most current and relevant research.

Starting Points:

- The newly established What Works Clearinghouse (www.w-w-c.org) is a Web site that helps educators make choices based on scientifically based research. The site, sponsored by the U.S. Department of Education, is being updated continuously and will offer information on various topics. (Please see the article Get REAL.)
- Handbooks of research are available in many content areas. These publications are typically edited by the leading scholars of the discipline, and they feature powerful and relevant research.
- Scholarly journals typically have a review process for material published. The complexity and thoroughness of this process varies from journal to journal. The description of these processes can be found in the journals themselves. The articles published in journals typically offer descriptions of new research and the studies' results.
- A list of "Places to Begin Building Knowledge" organized by topic appears at the bottom of this article and is a suggested starting point.

4. **Reading professionals take action.**
   Scientifically based reading research provides a framework through which we can continue to engage in investigation—and in instruction based on evidence. Begin to learn the language, ask the questions, and seek reliable sources for answers. Collect data to support or refute assumptions. As we bring more research into our schools and classrooms, this framework assists us in implementing new practices and helps us become more sophisticated consumers of literacy materials.

Educators, policymakers, and professional development providers are in the position—now more than ever—to contribute to the knowledge base and further change the landscape of American education. Although there are no quick steps for translating research into practice, it's time to begin the journey.

Collection of Reading Materials

State-Specific Reading First Committees. Under the new

legislation, states submit applications to the federal government for funding. In these applications, the states must lay out a comprehensive plan that details program information, professional development information, and assessment information. Because each state's plan differs, educators must pay close attention to their state's specific plan. Check your state's Web site to see what resources are available.

NRP Report. The National Reading Panel report, *Teaching Children to Read*, is a meta-analysis of reading research. It offers specific information that fits the scientifically based reading research criteria. Both an executive summary and the full report are available online at www.nationalreadingpanel.org/Publications/summary.htm.

CIERA and NIFL Report. *Put Reading First* is a publication co-sponsored by the Center for Improvement of Early Childhood Reading Achievement (CIERA) and the National Institute for Literacy. It details specific instructional implications. Strategies are suggested for teaching the five essential elements of reading. This publication is available online at www.nifl.gov/partnershipforreading/publications/Cierra.pdf.

Other Helpful Books. The International Reading Association (IRA) has published many helpful books. Two suggestions are:

- *What Research Has to Say About Reading Instruction* (3rd edition), edited by Alan E. Farstrup and S. Jay Samuels, is a collection of articles on research and reading instruction.
- *Evidence-Based Reading Instruction—Putting the National Reading Panel Report to Work* is a collection of articles published in various IRA journals.

Places to Begin Building Knowledge

Here are several credible sources that can be used as starting points on your quest:

Evaluation

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Contents | Previous | Next

Back to Top

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NCREL North Central Regional Educational Laboratory

LEARNING POINT

NCREL's Learning Point (Spring 2003)

Contents | Previous | Next

The Communication Gap

Building Effective Parent-Teacher Partnerships

By Ann Kinder

Parent involvement can have a positive effect on student success by influencing better test scores, encouraging attendance, and improving self-esteem. But what happens when teachers and parents find themselves at odds? How does this communication gap begin, and what can teachers and parents do to overcome it?

The Source of the Gap

There are many reasons why teachers and parents have difficulty communicating. One reason is that teachers may not receive sufficient preparation in parent communication from their colleges or universities. Requirements differ from college to college as to the number and type of communications courses students must take. Some colleges require only one course while others require an entire set of communication, problem solving, and professional behavior courses.

Gwynn Mettetal, a professor of educational psychology at Indiana University in South Bend, believes that communications skills are critical for teachers. "We have a required course early in the program that focuses almost entirely on communication skills and professional behaviors," she says. "The basic model of problem solving is taught, practiced, and used extensively. If students don't pass the course, they cannot continue in the program."

Not all colleges of education have these same rigorous standards. Consequently, some teachers graduate without the skills to handle questions and concerns posed by parents. This situation is an issue for one young teacher in Grand Rapids, Michigan. "I wasn't prepared to deal with some of the situations I encounter," he says. "I am held accountable for the academic success of my students, yet when I hold them accountable for completing an assignment or for not abusing hall-pass privileges, parents label me as a mean teacher."

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Lack of preparation is not the only reason for communication struggles between teachers and parents. Another reason, as Mettetal points out, is that teachers sometimes speak "teacher talk"—using educational jargon full of acronyms and terminology not commonly understood by those outside of the profession. This language can intimidate parents, making them less likely to be involved in their child's education.

Mettetal also explains that parents and teachers look at students from two different perspectives. "If they understand that they have different perspectives, they are more eager to talk and realize that they may see things differently," she says. "Hopefully, they will recognize that they must share information to get a good overall picture of the child." She also says that if teachers and parents do not realize that they represent two points of view, they may get sidetracked into arguing over who has the "right" perspective.

Anna Weselak, a member of the National PTA board of directors, believes another reason why communication gaps persist between teachers and parents is because communication often occurs only when there is a problem. Such communication can make parents feel uncomfortable. Also, if parents have unpleasant memories of their own school experiences, they may decide to be less involved in their own child's education.

According to Weselak, there are many ways for teachers and parents to establish more effective relationships. "Parents and teachers should consider themselves partners and should treat each other accordingly. It all begins with good communication."

Bridging the Gap

Teachers can begin to build better relationships with parents by creating ways to involve them in their child's learning. One suggestion is to use lessons that require students to get information from their parents, such as genetics information for a science class, a historical reference for a "where were you when..." essay, or even grocery shopping budgets for a math project.

Weselak suggests that communication between home and school should be regular, two-way, and meaningful. "Making personal contact with parents early in the school year can help to set a tone of openness between teachers and parents," she explains. "Also, teachers and parents should share with each other their best mode for communication, such as e-mail, phone calls, or notes."

Mettetal agrees, "Start at the beginning of the year to build good relationships." She advises teachers to invite parents to send them a letter telling them about their child's strengths, talents, hobbies, and home life. An introductory phone call is another way to reach out to parents. "Call each parent the first month of school to introduce yourself and to share something good that you have noticed about their child. If parents know that you appreciate their

child's good qualities, they will be more open to listening when you think there might be a problem."

Communicating to share good news as well as the bad is important. Kari Clarke, an elementary school teacher in Lake Forest, Illinois, keeps a daily journal to record the progress of students. "I talk to parents about what we did that day and how they can help their child review in the evening," she says.

Another method Clarke uses to connect with parents is a weekly newsletter put together by the students. "I write a letter from the editor and some feature articles, and the students add the weekly academic calendar, technology recommendations, interviews, and personal ads," she says. According to Clarke, the newsletter encourages the students to write and helps parents prepare their children for the upcoming week.

Involving parents in their child's education is essential. Parents who participate as school volunteers and decision makers get hands-on experiences with teachers, school personnel, and students. Julie Kovar, a special education teacher in Detroit says that her school encourages parent volunteers. "Parents can volunteer at their convenience," she says. "We make them feel comfortable whether they are participating in a classroom activity, assisting with office work, or merely observing students."

If a teacher finds that the usual methods of communication do not work with particular parents (as did the teacher in Grand Rapids who didn't feel prepared to handle some of the questions and concerns posed by parents), try this six-point plan recommended by Mettetal:

1. **Describe the problem.** Use specific behaviors, not labels. Use the sentence "I feel ___ when your child does ___."
2. **Use active listening.** Summarize, reflect, question, and share information.
3. **Brainstorm possible solutions** without using blame.
4. **Come to a consensus about a solution.** Make sure everyone agrees. Otherwise, try to compromise or use the trading rule ("We will try it your way this time and my way next time").
5. **Write a plan.** Decide who does what and when. Be as specific as possible.
6. **Follow up.** Set a time and criteria for evaluation.

According to Mettetal, everyone—parents, teachers, and especially students—benefits from good communication. She adds, "Good parent-teacher communication helps the teacher do a better job, helps parents feel better about their role and their involvement with the school and the educational process, and most of all helps children achieve their highest potential."

RESOURCES FOR TEACHERS

NCREL's Pathways to School Improvement Web site has several Critical Issues that deal with the topic of family and community involvement in education. Visit *Pathways* at www.ncrel.org/pathways. The specific Critical Issues on family and community are located at www.ncrel.org/sdrs/areas/pa0cont.htm.

The National PTA Web site offers wide array of resources on parent involvement at http://www.pta.org/parentinvolvement/. Learn about building partnerships with your child's school as well as tips such as Ways to Help Your Child Succeed, located at www.pta.org/parentinvolvement/helpchild/index.asp.

The National Parent Information Network provides a virtual library at www.npin.org/library.html that contains research-based information about the process of parenting and parent involvement in education. Check out How Can Parent-Teacher Differences Be Prevented or Resolved? by Lilian G. Katz, Amy Aidman, Debbie A. reese, and Ann-Marie Clark at www.npin.org/library/1998/n00043/n00043.html.

The U.S. Department of Education Web site is home to hundreds of resources for both parents and teachers. For more information, visit www.ed.gov.

Contents | Previous | Next

Back to Top

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NCREL North Central Regional Educational Laboratory

LEARNING POINT

NCREL's Learning Point (Spring 2003)

Contents | Previous | Next

NCREL News & Notes

NCREL Committed to Closing Achievement Gaps
NCREL's new *Closing the Achievement Gaps* Web site is a repository for collecting and organizing important research, promising strategies, relevant meeting notes, and valuable tools produced by NCREL. The site includes a Smart Library, which is a question-driven reference tool that helps users understand what the achievement gaps are, why they exist, and what can be done to help close them. Access the site at www.ncrel.org/gap/index.html.

NCREL Helps Educators Make Sense of NCLB
NCREL has developed a series of informative brochures called *Quick Keys* to help educators, policymakers, and administrators understand the basic components of the No Child Left Behind Act. The *Quick Keys* present components of the legislation in easy-to-understand formats and include topics such as reading, mathematics and science, English proficiency, technology integration, and schools in need of improvement. Each is available online at www.ncrel.org/policy/curve/ resource.htm#resources, or hard copies can be obtained by logging on to NCREL's Product Catalog (http://www.ncrel.org/ catalog) or calling 800-252-0283.

NCREL Helps Professional Developers Integrate Equitable Practices
Connecting With the Learner: An Equity Toolkit is now available on CD-ROM. Based on a revision of the original 600-page toolkit, it is designed for professional developers, with the intent that more equitable practices might be integrated into teaching, learning, assessment, and professional development. The toolkit provides a series of activities that can be used on a stand-alone basis or as a framework around which a particular equity issue can be explored in-depth. To request a complimentary copy, send an e-mail to mscproducts@contact.ncrel.org. Offer good while supplies last.

NCREL's Resource Center Now Features Special Collections
NCREL's Resource Center Web site includes a new feature. Special Collections is a topic-based list of resources that are available either in the Resource Center or on the Internet. The first collection highlights nearly 50 resources about closing the achievement gaps.

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The second, featuring literacy, will be coming soon. Visit NCREL's Resource Center online at www.ncrel.org/info/rc/sc.htm or call 800-356-2735.

Teacher Mobility Is Focus of New Web Site
NCREL introduces a new Web site dedicated to providing resources and information on teacher mobility. The site contains the results of NCREL's study *Teacher Turnover in the Midwest: Who Stays, Leaves, and Moves?* It also includes an interactive data tool that allows for customized searches of the results of the study. Other features are a compendium of resources on teacher mobility and a link to NCREL *Policy Issues* No. 10, which presents an overview of the results of the study. Discover the benefits of the useful Web site at www.ncrel.org/quality/mobility/mobile.htm.

Contents | Previous | Next

Back to Top

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NCREL North Central Regional Educational Laboratory

LEARNING POINT

NCREL's Learning Point (Spring 2003)

Contents | Previous | Next

Faces of NCREL

The People Behind the Work

Laine Strives for High Quality in Education

By Rebecca Phillips

Sabrina Laine, Ph.D., has long believed that access to a high-quality education is an inalienable right for every child in the United States and around the world. "Too many children and teenage youth continue to be denied their opportunity to learn because we do not ensure that they are in safe learning environments with highly qualified teachers," says Dr. Laine. It is with this passion that she has been a driving force for NCREL's work in teacher supply and demand, data-driven decision making, education policy, professional development, charter schools, comprehensive school reform, teacher quality, and countless other initiatives.

Dr. Laine is an associate director at NCREL, overseeing the work of the Office of Policy and Networks and the Office of State and Federal Reform Initiatives. In addition, she serves as program leader for the Regional Educational Laboratory operated by NCREL. She is the primary contact for the U.S. Department of Education contract officer and for NCREL's sister laboratories, and she oversees the lab's federal reporting requirements.

Since beginning her tenure at NCREL in 1996, Dr. Laine has also served as a senior policy analyst in the Evaluation, Policy, and Information Center (EPIC); as coordinator in the Center for Scaling Up; as director of EPIC; and director of the Center for Educational Decision Support Systems (EDSS).

"Policy decisions are too often made on the basis of anecdotal information," Dr. Laine notes. "The more we can inform and influence the policy debate by conducting new research, communicating the findings, and bringing people together to find middle ground—where political ideologies often drive people apart—

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the more likely changes in classroom practice will truly affect student performance."

Largely through Dr. Laine's contributions, NCREL has established itself as conducting high-quality, nonpartisan policy work in the Midwest and nationally. NCREL's policy publications, including *Viewpoints* and *Policy Issues*, have cultivated a reputation as research based and focused on both emerging and enduring policy issues. In addition, NCREL has convened policymakers around difficult and often partisan issues, and succeeded in helping all sides find common ground.

Dr. Laine has been instrumental in bringing together educators and building capacity around the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001. In response to the NCLB legislation, NCREL has convened meetings of state superintendents, state education agencies, educational service agencies, and local education agencies from the region. A wealth of information, both online and print, has been created and disseminated by NCREL since passage of the legislation in January 2002.

NCREL was one of the first organizations to see the power in making good data available to teachers, parents, and education leaders to inform decision making around improvements to curriculum and instruction. Under Dr. Laine's direction, NCREL's Center for Educational Decision Support Systems led the way in helping educators make informed decisions by making data more accessible, user friendly, and classroom based.

For example, two years ago NCREL convened high-level researchers from around the country to discuss class-size reduction programs and research findings. This conversation led to several NCREL-sponsored research studies that further contributed to the knowledge base on whether reducing class size makes a difference in student achievement. One of the NCREL studies by two researchers at Michigan State University concluded that while class-size reduction efforts do seem to contribute to higher student achievement, the investment of those same resources in teacher professional development would have an even higher payoff in terms of student achievement. This finding is critical information for policymakers who make decisions every day about how to allocate scarce resources.

Dr. Laine earned her doctorate in education policy from Indiana University. She holds a master's degree in comparative education from Indiana University and a master's degree in European law and economics from the University of Amsterdam. Prior to joining NCREL, Dr. Laine worked for three years as a research associate with the Education Policy Office at Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis, where she focused on issues such as school finance, school-to-work transition, and secondary-postsecondary transition.

NCREL North Central Regional Educational Laboratory

LEARNING POINT

NCREL's Learning Point (Spring 2003)

Contents | Previous | Next

Schools on the Rise Get REAL

Evidence-Based Change Yields Success in Ohio

By Mary Kathleen O'Kelly

Too often, it seems we believe the best way is the fastest way. Yet patience, along with persistence and steadfastness, does have its virtues. In a handful of rural Appalachian school districts, teachers and the families they serve are seeing the results of sustaining efforts grounded in scientifically based research for nearly four years—and are planning for many more years to come. Ultimately, they hope to have all students performing above state standards. The progress they have made so far is remarkable.

Project REAL (Rural Education Aligned for Learning) began in the summer of 1999 as an intervention for six troubled school districts in Ohio. The Ohio Department of Education had classified each of these districts, five of which are located in rural southeastern (Appalachian) Ohio, as under "academic emergency" or "academic watch." The districts were told to improve or risk having the state take them over.

Educational challenges in Appalachian Ohio are compounded by geographic and cultural challenges. The rural setting of these school districts often results in reduced opportunities for students to participate in the arts and use new technology. Many cultural experiences that are right down the road from suburban and urban schools—such as museums and zoos—are not available to rural students (Harmon, Henderson, & Royster, 2002). Internet access is often unreliable, and large distances between homes and schools make transportation difficult.

Countering these difficulties, however, are local-community pride and a willingness to try. It was with this willingness that teachers and administrators approached Project REAL.

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Project REAL is rooted in the best available scientifically based

research from the National Science Foundation and the Third International Mathematics and Science Study. The project began with intensive two- to three-week summer workshops organized by Ohio University at Ironton, which were followed by many inservice seminars and teacher collaborations.

The Project REAL team observed classrooms and examined every available set of data, especially the Ohio proficiency test results, and put together a report on the needs and strengths of the six participating districts. According to Dr. Gilbert Valdez, deputy director of NCREL and Project REAL codirector, "In both math and science, the teachers were doing quite well in three of seven areas, average in the fourth area, and deficient in the remaining three areas. And all three areas had to do with understanding concepts rather than memorizing facts."

It was determined then that two changes had to occur: The teachers needed to change their instructional practices, and the curriculum needed to be supplemented. "No matter how hard the teachers worked, they wouldn't be able to succeed without changes to the curriculum. It became all about working more strategically," says Valdez.

After careful examination of the districts' curricula and the state's standards, Project REAL moved ahead with some new approaches grounded in sound research. Changes to the math curriculum included the addition of Connected Mathematics® and Cognitive Tutor® Algebra. To supplement the science curriculum, Project REAL introduced Fast and Foss™ science programs and Active Physics®. The needs identified in the schools were specifically matched with the strengths these programs had to offer.

At first, not everyone ageed with the changes. According to one local teacher, the veteran teachers resisted because it was "just one more thing coming through." Yet the teachers agreed to commit, and NCREL promised four years with Dr.Valdez. "We made a commitment to them that we would not change staff—that we would keep the project stable," he explains.

Some teachers and principals struggled with the changes within their curricula—and within themselves. Says Dr. Valdez, "Improving learning is emotional for both the teacher and the person trying to help because it becomes about identity: What is a teacher? And who am I as a teacher?"

However, guiding and motivating teachers is the most direct path to students. As one teacher explained, "It's from our hands right straight down to the students."

Some parents too, had a difficult time knowing how to help their children with homework. Most were accustomed to ditto sheets and

take-home workbooks. The trainers not only had to show teachers how to adjust their styles to allow for more student exploration but also had to show parents a new way to guide their children's inquiry-based assignments. Instead of helping their children fill in pages of addition problems, parents were encouraged to have the students plan and shop for family meals, thus learning a practical foundation for the application of math to everyday family life.

The core of Project REAL is its emphasis on hands-on, practical, engaged learning, and the students are responding. In 1998, the Symmes Valley Local School District, one of the districts participating in Project REAL, met only 6 of 22 performance standards on the district report card. The district was sliding into academic emergency. Said one fourth-grade science teacher, "When Project REAL first came through, it just seemed like another organization. Then, when [the other teachers] saw the benefits in the classroom...it just spread throughout our entire building. Project REAL has opened everybody's mind up about what we should be doing." Those classroom benefits resulted in Symmes Valley being recognized for meeting 21 of 22 performance standards in 2002— a remarkable turnaround in only four years.

Project REAL also emphasizes writing in all content areas. Some researchers suggest, in fact, that students who try to write out their thoughts about mathematical concepts actually learn and reinforce those concepts through the process of writing (Johanning, 2000). The teachers in Project REAL districts attended a workshop called "Writing Across the Curriculum," in which they got hands-on experience with five types of writing—and the correlated assessment of that writing —that can be used to strengthen math and science lessons.

To some, the very idea of mixing writing with math seemed odd. After seeing the process in action however, participants were newly motivated. As one teacher said, "This sounds like something I can use that is teacher friendly and student effective." Writing assignments in math and science labs need not take extra time away from lessons, and that concept—improving both the teaching and the learning of mathematics and science—is what is driving Project REAL's success.

As teachers use scientifically based methods to change how they teach, they also change how they think—how they think about themselves and how they think about their students. Teachers are starting to believe in the great potential of their students, regardless of where the students live or the economic plight of their families. No longer is the high poverty and remoteness of many of these schools being used as an excuse for poor performance, and those higher expectations are increasing along with performance.

So far, the districts have seen real results. Of the six districts (see "The REAL Facts" below), all have realized gains in the percentage

of students passing the Ohio Proficiency Tests in math and science. The scores of Adams County/Ohio Valley Local School District's ninth-grade math students increased 18.1 percent; from 1999 to 2001, scores of Symmes Valley Local School District's sixth-grade science students increased 25.7 percent; during the same time, and scores of Dawson-Bryant Local School District's fourth-grade math students increased 36.2 percent;. As of late November 2002, all six districts had been removed from academic watch and academic emergency lists.

The dedication to Project REAL demonstrated by both teachers and families has led to students in rural Ohio making very REAL gains.

The REAL Facts

What is Project REAL?
Project REAL (Rural Education Aligned for Learning) is a multiorganizational program that integrates curriculum-to-standards alignment with teacher professional development.

Which organizations are involved?
Project REAL could not have been so successful without the support and close cooperation of the following organizations: Ohio University at Ironton, Appalachian Rural Systemic Initiative (ARSI), the Ohio School Network, NCREL, and the 15 participating schools. The project began with generous funding from the Ohio Department of Education. The director of this successful endeavor is Tom Suter from Ohio University at Ironton. NCREL is honored to be affiliated with such a dedicated and knowledgeable team.

Which Ohio school districts does Project REAL help?
Adams County/Ohio Valley Local School Distict, Adams County
Dawson-Bryant Local School District, Lawrence County
Northwest Local School District, Scioto County
Symmes Valley Local School District, Lawrence County
Western Local School District, Pike County
Zane Trace Local School District, Ross County

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Contents | Previous | Next

Back to Top

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NCREL North Central Regional Educational Laboratory

LEARNING POINT

NCREL's Learning Point (Spring 2003)

Contents | Previous | Next

Partners For Success
Walking the Walk - The What Works Clearinghouse

The What Works Web site can be found at www.w-w-c.org.

By Chris Otto

The active promotion and emphasis on scientifically based research (SBR) in education originating from inside the Beltway raises many questions for educators. What qualifies as SBR? How will it affect change in schools? What does it mean for teachers? Another fair question is: What is the federal government itself doing to support and implement the use of SBR and to help educators find and use SBR? One way the U.S. Department of Education plans to support the use of SBR is through the establishment of the What Works Clearinghouse.

Through its Institute of Education Sciences (IES), the Department of Education has dedicated a tremendous amount of resources to the creation of a central, trusted source for scientific evidence of "what works" in education.Those behind the What Works Clearinghouse, or WWC,would like nothing more than to help education join medicine, psychology, and economics as an evidence-based field. "By providing educators with ready access to the best available scientific research evidence, the Clearinghouse will be an important resource for enhancing the quality of local decision-making and improving program effectiveness," said Secretary of Education Rod Paige (U.S. Department of Education, 2002).

The WWC is developing standards for reviewing and synthesizing research on effectiveness and intends to publish its findings in "layman's terms" so educators across the country can more easily determine for themselves what works and what doesn't.

Launched in August 2002, the clearinghouse is administered through a joint venture of two internationally recognized leaders in the fields of education research and reviews of scientific evidence. The Campbell Collaboration in Philadelphia and the American

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Institutes for Research in Washington, D.C., bring impressive credentials to the project.

The Campbell Collaboration is an international consortium of social science researchers who conduct systematic reviews of trials on the effectiveness of interventions in education and other social sectors.

Robert Boruch heads Campbell's Steering Group and serves as the principal investigator for the WWC. He is the University Trustee Chair professor of the Graduate School of Education at the Wharton School and the Fels Center for Government at the University of Pennsylvania. Boruch's work has been recognized by the American Educational Research Association, the Policy Studies Organization, and the American Evaluation Association.

Rebecca Herman, a principal research scientist at the American Institutes for Research, is the project director for the WWC. Herman is lead author of *An Educator's Guide to Schoolwide Reform*, a widely respected review of scientifically based evidence on the effectiveness of well-known school reform models. She has also served as principal investigator for the National Longitudinal Evaluation of Comprehensive School Reform, the largest federal government investment in studying whole-school reform efforts and their impact on student achievement.

The qualifications of those involved, the resources behind the effort, and the thought put into the structure and function of the WWC are undeniably extensive. Through the development and use of a group of online databases, the WWC will provide its findings in the form of:

- Reviews of the effectiveness of interventions intended to enhance student outcomes.
- Information about studies on which those reviews have been based.
- Scientifically rigorous reviews of test instruments used to assess educational effectiveness.
- A registry of individuals and organizations willing to conduct outcome evaluations of interventions.

The backbone of the WWC will be the development and release of online Evidence Reports. These reports will provide information on how effective educational interventions are and how they can be used to inform decision making, improve practice, and enhance student outcomes.

The WWC will select topic areas each year to be addressed by the Evidence Reports. After prioritizing the topics, the clearinghouse will conduct a wide search of published and nonpublished literature, while at the same time calling for submissions from program and product developers and others relating to each topic area.

The studies on the programs, practices, and products related to a

specific topic will then undergo a stringent review of their research, methods, and results using rigorous standards, protocols, and guidelines. The development of these tools and monitoring of their application are guided by an independent technical advisory group.

The resulting Evidence Reports will be thorough, comprehensive, authoritative looks at the topic and relevant available research, allowing educators, researchers, policymakers, and the public to evaluate for themselves the quality, value, and relevance of the research as it applies to their specific needs.

Topics selected for the first year of WWC work are as follows:

- Interventions for Beginning Reading
- Curriculum-Based Interventions for Increasing K-12 Math Achievement
- Programs for Preventing High School Dropout
- Programs for Increasing Adult Literacy
- Peer-Assisted Learning in Elementary Schools: Reading, Mathematics, and Science Gains
- Interventions to Reduce Delinquent, Disorderly, and Violent Behavior In and Out of School
- Interventions for Elementary School English Language Learners: Increasing English Language Acquisition and Academic Achievement

The WWC is currently accepting nominations of specific programs, practices, products, and policies, as well as related studies, for review within these topic areas. The organization hopes to release its first Evidence Report in fall 2003.

For More Information, Please Contact:

What Works Clearinghouse
2277 Research Boulevard, MS 6M
Rockville, MD 20850

Email: wwcinfo@w-w-c.org

Phone: 866-WWC-9799

Web site: www.w-w-c.org

Reference

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Contents | Previous | Next

NCREL North Central Regional Educational Laboratory

LEARNING POINT

NCREL's Learning Point (Spring 2003)

Contents | Previous

Point of Reference

Perspectives from the NCREL Resource Center

Need Research? Ask Us

By Arlene Hough

Each year, thousands of aspiring teachers enroll in colleges and universities nationwide to learn what it takes to stand in front of a classroom and impart their newfound knowledge. But that newfound knowledge does not always remain "new." Rookie teachers quickly find out that the way they teach and the ways students learn are constantly evolving.

With hardly a moment to spare from the time the first bell rings to student dismissal, it is difficult for teachers and administrators to find time to keep up with the latest thoughts on teaching and learning. However, with the right resources, it is not impossible to find ways to bring research on successful practices into the classroom.

For years, one of the best kept secrets in the Midwest has been the Resource Center at the North Central Regional Educational Laboratory (NCREL). We are a professional library that has evolved from a service center for NCREL staff to an education information resource for inquiring minds worldwide. Teachers, administrators, parents, and educational service agencies have all taken advantage of the services offered by NCREL's Resource Center. On average, we receive over 275 requests for education-related information every month.

By tracking requests over the past 10 years, we identified the top 25 requested topics. We then created a resource— known as Rapid Response Packets—which addresses each of these important topics. Each packet contains an up-todate bibliography and a collection of articles that deal with a specific education topic. Closing the Achievement Gaps, Brain Research, Block Scheduling, and Classroom Management are some of the most requested topics. The information packets are available free of charge and distributed

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"rapidly." With the No Child Left Behind Act influencing so many of the decisions being made at state, district, and school levels, it is now more important than ever to use scientific, research-based materials to reinforce those decisions. Through the work of the Resource Center, NCREL is committed to providing access to such materials.

Bringing research into the classroom is vital to the continuing growth of classroom practice. Free, relevant, research-based information is only an e-mail or phone call away through the NCREL Resource Center. You can request information on education topics through e-mail (info@ncrel.org), by phone (800-356-2735), or through the mail (1120 E. Diehl Road, Suite 200, Naperville, IL 60563).Your questions will be answered in a timely fashion, by professional librarians who will provide you with current, research-based information that is user friendly and relevant. We are proud of the work we do here. Call us.We can help.

Contents | Previous

Back to Top

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